

Wilderness Act Allows for Mining in Designated Wilderness Areas, a note from Keith Lannom, Payette National Forest Supervisor, June 23, 2015.

You may have heard about my approval of mineral activities at the Golden Hand mine in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Area. I'd like to provide some background information about regulation of mining in National Forests and the Golden Hand project.

Mining does take place on National Forest System land. Our National Forest System is managed by the U.S. Forest Service, which is a multiple use agency meaning that land uses are allowable for the greatest good, for the greatest number of people. Mining is an allowable use of the forest lands and the Payette National Forest has a long history of mining activities as provided for by federal law and regulation – specifically, the 1872 Mining Law, the 1897 Organic Administration Act, the Multiple Use Mining Act of 1955 and Federal Regulation at 36 CFR 228(A). As provided by these laws and regulations, the question before me regarding this project was not whether or not work on these mining claims should take place in the wilderness - that question had already been asked and answered by Congress.

Congress allowed mining in wilderness areas under certain circumstances in the Wilderness Act of 1964, and subsequently the 1980 Central Idaho Wilderness Act, which established the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness.

The Golden Hand #1 and #2 Lode Mining Claims Plan of Operations that I approved allows the claimant to conduct claim validation work as ordered by the Federal District Court for Idaho in a 2002 decision. This validation work is to ensure that valid rights exist. To establish valid rights, mining claimants must show they have made a discovery of a valuable mineral deposit, and that is what this project is allowing. At this time, the activities do not include full scale mining operations.

We know that mining can be a contentious issue. The mining activities associated with the Golden Hand project are likely to bring more people to the table to discuss the pros and cons, but again, it is important for everyone to know that mining activities within designated wilderness are allowed by law.

For all mining activities on National Forest System lands, federal law dictates that the Forest Service is responsible for management of the surface resource while the mineral resource is managed by the Department of Interior. This means the Forest Service must establish requirements to minimize the disturbance of surface resources.

Using procedures established under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), we have studied potential impacts to the surface resources and have established mitigation standards specific to the Golden Hand project. The public had the opportunity to comment on the standards proposed, but it's important to know that, as provided by federal law, the question before the public was not should mining activities take place, but rather has the Forest Service required the mining company to adequately provide for the protection of natural resources such as vegetation, fisheries, clean water, wildlife, wildlife habitat and visual impacts, while complying with a Federal Court decision.

I do believe I have chosen the alternative that minimizes adverse environmental impacts to the resources we manage. My decision will result in a temporary impact to the wilderness character of the area, but has been determined to be the minimum impact necessary considering the direction of the Court. While impacts will be noticeable, our standards for the protection of the environment will reduce the negative impacts to the greatest extent possible while complying with Federal Laws.

My decision includes a number of Project Design Features (PDFs) incorporated to minimize or avoid effects on a variety of resources such as soil, water quality, vegetation, wetland and riparian resources, wildlife, fish, heritage resources, transportation and public safety, wilderness and recreation, visuals, air quality/noise, and socioeconomics. Many of these PDFs were recommended by the proponent, American Independence Mines and Minerals (AIMMCO), regulatory agencies, Tribal partners, and the public.

If you have questions about this project please come to us. We will gladly provide information that will help you understand the project and its long history.. We have posted the Record of Decision, and all the supporting documents on our website at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/payette/goldenhand>

The following is a brief summary of the actions that will occur as a result of my decision:

The decision does allow for the following:

Outside the Wilderness:

- Maintain portions of Forest Roads (FR) 371 and 373 between the Big Creek Trailhead and Pueblo Summit and maintain approximately 0.1 miles of temporary road
- Replace a ford of the North Fork of Smith Creek on FR 373 with a bridge or arch pipe structure.
- Store fuel outside of the Wilderness at the Werdenhoff mill.
- Establish a temporary camp outside of the Wilderness at the Werdenhoff mill.

Inside the Wilderness:

- Maintain 4.0 miles of temporary roads.
- Repair a ford on a tributary to Coin Creek, and repair a ford on Coin Creek.
- Authorize up to 571 motorized trips into the FC-RONR Wilderness annually. Motorized trips within the Wilderness claim operating area to transport needed items from the storage area to work sites will be kept to the minimum necessary.
- Construct 11 drill pads from which 13-18 core holes will be drilled.
- Collect rock chip samples from pits excavated to bedrock at several locations in the temporary roads.
- Reopen and timber a caved mine adit (the "Ella") to allow access for underground mapping and sampling. Excavated material will be placed on the existing flat disturbed area in front of the portal location.
- Use a variety of vehicles and equipment including, but not limited to, four-wheel-drive pickup trucks, a 7 cubic yard dump truck, flatbed truck, D-8 (or equivalent) bulldozer, 3-cubic yard loader or small excavator, a track or skid-mounted drill rig, air compressor, small jackhammer, and generators.

- Obtain water from Coin Creek, which will not exceed 25,000 gallons per day. The water will be obtained and used in accordance with a temporary water right issued by the Idaho Department of Water Resources.
- Conduct defined reclamation activities at the end of each season.

Keith Lannom